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ABSTRACT

The manual provides a guide to the Community Exploration Program for older adolescents and young adults with mental illness, offered at Thresholds, a psychiatric rehabilitation center in Chicago (Illinois). The program is designed to acquaint the youth with the types of jobs found in the community and offers both vocational and independent living skills training. The curriculum is structured to run for 16 weeks, meeting one afternoon every second week. Stressed is the importance of recruiting and dealing with employers who will allow student access to employment settings. Fourteen topics are covered, with objectives, an outline, and activity materials. The first two sessions are introductory and cover general information about the community and using the public transportation system. The following five sessions involve visiting work settings such as factories, restaurants, business and professional offices, gas stations, and hospitals. The final session provides for summarizing and evaluating the Community Exploration Program. (DB)

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# The Community Exploration Program: Vocational Laboratory Experiences For Psychiatrically Disabled Youth

Thresholds

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# The Community Exploration Program: Vocational Laboratory Experiences for Psychiatrically Disabled Youth

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The Community Exploration Program: Vocational Laboratory Experiences for Psychiatrically Disabled Youth

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## Introduction

Program Purpose. The purpose of the Community Exploration Program is to acquaint psychiatrically disabled youth with the surrounding community by focusing on the types of jobs that are found there. The Community Exploration Program has been designed to serve as a laboratory setting where students can apply vocational knowledge learned in the Thresholds "Enhancing Employability" Curriculum by relating it to actual work environments. However, the program can just as successfully be run as a stand-alone experiential group.

Using the Community as a Learning Laboratory. The program is designed to provide young adults with opportunities to investigate the local community in order to become familiar with a variety of different job sites. This approach has the advantage of offering both vocational and independent living skills training, by using the community as a learning site for persons with mental illness. Since many youngsters with severe mental illness have spent a large part of their teenage years in psychiatric hospitals, they have missed acquiring basic knowledge about competitive employment. The informal yet extremely valuable information that most teenagers learn from summer jobs, after-school work, and simple observation is often missing for youth with mental illness. The program is designed to bridge these information gaps, and increase youths' exposure to the local community at the same time.

Program Structure. The curriculum is structured to run for sixteen weeks, meeting in eight sessions for one afternoon, every other week. It is advisable that it be coordinated and supervised by a vocational placement specialist who has had experience working with psychiatrically disabled young adults in community settings. The curriculum is also designed to be highly flexible in order to accommodate the availability of different work settings in different communities.

Recruiting and Dealing with Employers. An important component of the program is gaining access for students to employment settings through the participation of community employers in the Community Exploration Program. Obviously, the program's success hinges on the ability to recruit employers who are willing to allow such visits. A separate section of the curriculum deals with this task, offering suggestions about who to approach and how.

Session 1: Learning About the Community

Objectives: The students will:

1. Be able to verbally describe their community, identify several places where they could go to run errands, eat out, shop, or have fun.

2. Discuss different work sites in the community where they might be interested in working.

3. Meet the short-term goal of being able to name 5 of these businesses, as well as their locations, in the neighborhood surrounding the agency.

Outline:

1. Begin with a discussion that introduces the content and purpose of the Community Exploration Program: to become more knowledgeable about the local community, the public transportation system, and to visit actual work sites and explore what it would be like to work there.

2. Explain that there is a short-term goal that will be established for each group meeting.

3. Introduce the map of the city that will be used to chart the job sites visited and to familiarize the group members with the city.

4. Talk about the neighborhood in which the agency is located. Ask about experiences the students have had in the community.

5. Give each student a copy of Community Exploration Program Assessment. Explain that it is not a test, but a way to see what they do in the community, how often, and with whom they socialize. It would be helpful to read the questions aloud as they read silently, giving them time after each to write down both answers.

6. Talk about the next session -- use of the public transportation system. If possible, walk to the closest bus or elevated line stop to pick up maps and schedules. Ask students to bring them to the next session.

Be sure to pick up extras in case a student forgets or loses his/her maps or schedules.

7. Upon returning to the agency, divide the class into two groups. Explain that at the next session, each group will plan a public transportation route and will travel to a pre-selected spot and back to the agency. Make sure students are prepared by encouraging and answering questions about the upcoming travel. Remind students that they need to bring their bus passes or enough money to travel round trip with transfers.

8. Finally, give the students the Neighborhood Survey. Tell them that they are to find the answers to each of the items over the next two weeks and bring the completed questionnaire to the next session. Encourage students to find the answers to these questions together in groups of "explorers." Explain that the neighborhood is a good place to start when thinking about places to work and types of jobs available within their community.

## COMMUNITY EXPLORATION PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

These questions are about what you do in your spare time, especially what you have done in the past month. Place the number that best describes what you have done in the Activity column and the number that best describes who you were with in the With column. If you have done any of the activities alone and with someone in the same month, you can write down both in the With column.

**Activity**

1 = haven't done it this month
2 = have done it once or twice this month
3 = have done it about once a week this month
4 = have done it several times a week this month
5 = have done it every day this month

**With**

6 = alone
7 = with another Thresholds member
8 = with a friend (not a member)
9 = with a family member
10 = with a professional worker or therapist
11 = other
12 = doesn't apply

| | Activity | With |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Participated in entertainment activities | |
| 2. | Watched T.V. | |
| 3. | Went to the movies | |
| 4. | Played cards | |
| 5. | Read | |
| 6. | Listened to music | |
| 7. | Went to museums, art galleries, concerts | |
| 8. | Used public transportation | |
| 9. | Asked someone else for directions when using public transportation | |
| 10. | Attended church | |

| | Activity | With |
|---|---|---|
| 11. | Attended a club, group, or community meeting | |
| 12. | Went to school | |
| 13. | Visited friends | |
| 14. | Spent time alone | |
| 15. | Just sat and thought | |
| 16. | Just sat and smoked | |
| 17. | Daydreamed | |
| 18. | Worked on a hobby | |
| 19. | Slept during the daytime | |

Adapted from: Katz, M. and Lyerly, S. (1963). Method of measuring adjustment and social behavior in the community: Rationale, description, discriminative validity, and scale development. Psychological Reports, 13, 503-535.

NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

DO NOT GO FURTHER THAN 4 BLOCKS FROM THE AGENCY ON THIS HUNT FOR THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS!!

1. If you needed change or wanted to cash a check, where could you go?

   a. _____

   b. _____

2. Name 2 stores that sell their products at a discount.

   a. _____

   b. _____

3. Name 2 pharmacies where you could go to have a prescription filled.

   a. _____

   b. _____

4. Where can you buy a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk?

   a. _____

   b. _____

5. Where can you buy a book to read?

   a. _____

6. Where is the nearest post office or place to buy stamps?

   a. _____

   b. _____

7. If you wanted a sports T-shirt, where would you shop?

   a. _____

8. If you wanted a piece of cake or pie, where could you buy one?

   a. _____

9. Is there a place that you could have lunch outside? Where?

   a. _____

10. Name 3 places where you could work with clothing or clothing sales.

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

11. Name 3 places to work if you wanted to do restaurant work.

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

12. Where could you stock shelves in a grocery store?

   a. _____

13. What jobs might be available at a dry cleaners?

   a. _____

   b. _____

14. Name 2 jobs where you think that you might be able to sit down all day while working.

   a. _____

   b. _____

15. Name 2 jobs where you think that you might be able to stand all day while working.

   a. _____

   b. _____

16. Where in this neighborhood might you be able to work outside?

a. _____

b. _____

17. Where do you think that you might get a free meal as part of your job?

a. _____

18. If you were interested in the medical field or a hospital setting, could you work in this neighborhood?

a. _____

Where?

a. _____

b. _____

19. Name a job in this neighborhood that you think you would like.

_____

Why would you like this kind of job?

_____

_____

20. Name a job in this neighborhood that you think you would not like.

_____

Why would you dislike this type of job?

_____

_____

Session 2: Using the Public Transportation System

Objectives: The students will:

1. Become familiar with the public transportation systems (buses, trains, elevated lines, subways) and how to use these methods of traveling.

2. Be able to contact the appropriate Information Service departments to receive assistance in planning a route.

3. Meet the short-term goal of successfully completing a trip on public transportation.

Outline:

1. Review what you went over in the last class.

2. Split the class into the two groups that were formed in the last meeting. Help each group select a destination and assist them in planning the route, using the city maps and public transportation schedules to aid in planning. This will include picking the best type of transportation as well as how to use it. If possible, ask one member from each group to call the Information Service to confirm the plans that they have made.

3. Since it would be best for each student to gain experience calling Information, you might wish to compile a list of different destinations and ask the students to call the Information Service after class to find out how to best get to one or two of them.

4. Instruct each group to take the public transportation route they planned to the chosen destination. If you think it is best, have an instructor or case manager go with each group, but ask him/her to intervene as little as possible, even if the group makes a mistake. Obviously this requires some judgement on the part of the staff person. But, the emphasis should be on allowing the students themselves to identify right and wrong approaches. Students' questions should be directed to others (bus drivers, passengers), as they would be if traveling independently.

5. Ask each student to document the trip. They can do this by keeping a brief list of the trains or buses that they took or the stops at which they got off. They should also keep the transfer ticket or train receipt card if one is given. If the destination selected is a museum or municipal building, there is often a brochure students can bring back with them to "prove" they made it there (e.g., Chicago Historical Society or Art Institute brochure).

6. Tell each group to return to the agency as as soon as this exercise is complete. Once they are back in the classroom, have them show their "documentation" (ticket stubs, destination pamphlets) to the class. Congratulate them on their completion of the assignment, and start a discussion of their trips, prompting them to tell the kind of problems that occurred. Ask them how these were handled and whether these methods worked. Ask them if they think there was a faster or better way to go. Find out if anything happened on the trip that was not planned for. If they feel comfortable, ask them to discuss personal reactions (excitement, fear, anxiety) to this exercise.

7. Ask students to take out their completed Neighborhood Survey. Go over each item, encouraging students to relate their experiences collecting the information. Ask students to think about how much they knew about the neighborhood before completing the survey, and how much more they know now. Collect completed surveys and save them to include in each student's program file. Give out a second blank copy of the Neighborhood Survey and instruct students to complete it over the next two weeks for the neighborhoods surrounding their homes.

8. Inform students that the next session will be spent traveling to, touring, and perhaps working in a factory to learn more about the types of jobs available there. Ask them to think about questions that they might have about factory work. Tell them that jeans are appropriate attire for this visit.

Session 3: Visiting Work Settings - General Instructions

Because the goals and methods of each of the visits to work settings are basically the same, it is useful to present them here first. Although not repeated in each group outline, they should be used at each session. While you will wish to avoid appearing repetitive, the students will learn more if they are reminded of these goals and methods for every work setting visited.

1. Students should be prepared at the preceding session for each work site visit and what they should expect to be going on in the work environment. Together, prepare questions to ask the employer or workers. If students need to dress a certain way (such as jeans for the gas station visit or more formally for the office visits), remind them to do so. This is important for the sake of the students' comfort and ease at the work site as well as the employers'.

2. On the way to each site, "quiz" the students on their knowledge of the city by asking such things as, "What part of the city are we in?" "What bus would you take to get here?" "What street are we on and which direction should we be headed?"

3. Visits consist of the following: (a) a brief talk from the employer or supervisor about the company and its expectations of workers; (b) a tour of the work area; and (c) questions from students. As group leader, be prepared to facilitate student questions and be prepared to set the example and ease their anxiety by asking a few of your own.

3. Process the visit by going over the discussion questions (given below) on the return trip to the agency; students tend to give their best feedback at that time. Remember to ask them whether or not they would enjoy working there. It is important to note that this group is a sampling ground in the world of work for these students, and that they do not need to feel that they must like or want to work at every site. This program is their opportunity to examine various occupations and weigh them against their own vocational interests.

4. Upon returning to the agency after each work setting visit, give the "Community Exploration Evaluation" (at the end of this section). Student answers should be collected by the staff and placed in a workbook to be given to students at the end of the program for their future use.

5. If your program includes them, group placement employers who are already familiar with the agency's program are the best resources for work site visits. Since they already have persons with psychiatric disabilities working for them, they usually will be receptive to visits from these students. If your agency has no placement sites, consider visiting the work places of different students' parents or spouses of program staff. Work settings containing a personal contact are typically the most accommodating to you and your students.

6. We have found at Thresholds that the following guidelines have been useful when arranging visits:

   a. Use the placement coordinator. He/she knows the best employers to contact, and a preliminary phone call from him/her to employers paves the way for your own call to arrange a visit.

   b. Explain to the employer the purpose of the group ("I have a young adult job club from _____ agency and we are interested in learning more about the work you do.") Ask if it would be possible to receive a tour, view (placement) employees at work and to receive a brief talk about the company's purpose and what he/she looks for in employees. Ask if there are any work tasks that students could be taught and perform during their visit.

   c. Be sure to accommodate the employer on group size. Office tours should be limited to yourself and 3-5 students.

   d. Schedule visits at least 2 weeks in advance to allow for unforeseen scheduling problems.

   e. Follow each visit with a thank-you note; it helps make a second visit welcome.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

To be used after every work site visit:

1. What are the tasks performed by the worker (this may involve more than one job description depending on the visit)? In other words, what is the basic job description?

2. Give an outline of the workers' day.

3. What are the relationships, as far as you could see, between co-workers, and co-worker and employer?

4. What are the products made at this company?

5. How does the employee get paid? How does he/she dress?

6. Above all, members should be able to discuss why or why not they would like to work at a particular job site. Finding this out in a non-threatening environment is the purpose of the program.

## COMMUNITY EXPLORATION EVALUATION

NAME _____

NAME OF SITE _____

1. What kind of work would you do at this site?

   _____

   _____

2. What hours would you work? _____

3. Would you have to punch a time clock? _____

4. Describe the dress code.

   _____

   _____

5. Does the job involve working with the public? _____

6. Is smoking allowed on the job? _____At break? _____

7. Right now, do you have the skills required to work at this job?

   _____

8. Would you like to work at this site? Explain your answer.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

Session 3: Work Settings - Factories

Objectives: The students will:

1. Visit a factory in the local community (one of the enclaves where you have a job coach running a group placement would be best, if possible).

2. Tour the physical plant, observe a variety of workers performing their jobs, and learn some information about the production process.

3. Meet the short-term goal of being able to describe at least 4 steps of the production process.

Outline:

1. Review what you learned in the last group.

2. Go to the factory (following the guidelines given in the Visiting Work Settings section).

3. If possible (check with employer and workers first, of course), have the students do some of the work beside other agency workers to get a feel for the type of tasks done.

4. When back at the agency, ask the following, more specific questions to draw out actual feelings and understanding about the work done at the factory:

   a. Where is the factory located?

   b. How do other agency members who work there get to work?

   c. How many other agency members work there? What product are these people responsible for?

   d. How many hours at a time does a employee work? Do they get any breaks? If so, for how long?

   e. Who, if any, are the job coaches? What are their job tasks?

   f. How are wages determined? How would an employee raise his/her salary?

g. Name 2 reasons why you would like to work in a factory. Name 2 reasons why you would not like to work in a factory.

5. Have the students fill out the "Community Exploration Evaluation."

6. Ask the students to take out the Neighborhood Survey they completed for the communities around their homes. Go over each item, encouraging students to relate their experiences collecting the information. Ask students to think about how much they knew about their neighborhoods before doing the survey, and how much more they know now. Be sure to compare and contrast the different types of work opportunities in different types of neighborhoods (urban, residential). Collect completed surveys and save them to include in each student's program file workbook.

7. Remind the students that they will be visiting a restaurant for the next session and ask them to think about questions they might have.

Session 4: Work Settings - Restaurants

Objectives: The students will:

1. Visit a restaurant in the local community.

2. Tour this restaurant (including the kitchen, bar, storage, cashier, dining areas, and business offices) to learn about all parts of the restaurant business, observe the workers performing their job tasks, and learn more about the process of food preparation.

3. Meet the short-term goal of correctly describing 3 areas of the restaurant or specific job tasks that are involved in making a meal order.

Outline:

1. Review what happened in the last class, answering any more questions students might have about factory work.

2. Go to a local restaurant. (Follow guidelines given in the Visiting Work Settings section.)

3. If possible, have the students do some job tasks (food preparation, cleaning tables) beside other agency workers.

4. Allow each student to order a dessert and a beverage, asking them to observe what tasks go into processing this order (who makes it, who packages it, how it is entered on the cash register).

5. Upon returning to the agency, ask the following, more specific questions:

   a. What are the responsibilities of the cooks, cashiers, people who clean the tables, etc.?

   b. How long should it take a customer to be served?

   c. How long is the training period for new employees?

d. What is the difference between fast food places and other restaurants?

e. Would you rather work in a fast food place or another type of restaurant?

f. Why would you like or not like to work in the restaurant business?

6. Have the students fill out the "Community Exploration Evaluation."

7. Remind the students to dress professionally for the next session, because they will be visiting 2 office settings.

Session 5: Work Settings - Business and Professional Offices

Objectives: The students will:

1. Visit both a large corporate firm and a small business office setting in the local community.

2. Tour each office, observe the workers performing their jobs, and listen to a short talk by the personnel director about what goes on in the offices on a daily basis.

3. Meet the short-term goal of being able to describe 5 differences between the 2 office settings.

Outline:

1. Review what was learned in the last group.

2. Before going, inform the students that they will be expected to note 5 differences between the two different offices.

3. Go to each of the offices. (Follow guidelines given in the Visiting Work Settings section.)

4. When you get return to the agency, ask the students the following, more specific questions:

   a. What is the appropriate dress code for each position (mail room worker, security guard, secretary, receptionist)?

   b. Name the responsibilities for: the mail room worker, the security guard, the secretaries, and the receptionist.

   c. How does someone get promoted in these offices?

   d. What educational level do most of the employees have?

   e. What is an "entry level" position in office work?

   f. Who is in charge of each department? What are his/her responsibilities?

g. Would you like to work in an office?

5. Give the students the "Community Exploration Evaluation."

6. Remind the students that they will be going to a gas station next session. Ask them to dress in old jeans, as they will be asked to pump gas, clean windows, and check oil and transmission fluids.

**Session 6:** Work Settings - Gas Stations

**Objectives:** The students will:

1. Visit a gas station in the local community.
2. Tour the gas station, observing the workers performing job tasks.
3. Meet the short-term goal of demonstrating the ability to correctly operate the gas pump, wash the windshields, and check the fluids of an automobile.

**Outline:**

1. Review the material from the last group.
2. Make sure that it will be okay for the students to actually operate the gas pump *before* going to the work site. If the employer is reluctant, change the short-term goal to being able to *say* how to operate a gas pump.
3. Go to a local gas station. (Follow the guidelines given in the *Visiting Work Settings* section.)
4. Have the station manager instruct students in how to run the gas pump. Also, have them learn how to clean windows and how to check the oil and transmission fluids. Make sure that *each* student knows how to do these things.
5. Back at the agency, ask these questions:
   a. How many attendants are on duty per shift? How long is each shift?
   b. Name the attendant's responsibilities.
   c. Explain how the gas pump works. How does the person running the cash register know how much to charge for the gas?
   d. What items are stocked in the garage, if there is one?
   e. Do you have to be a mechanic to work at a gas station?

f. Explain how to check the oil and transmission fluid levels.

g. Would you like to work at a gas station?

6. Have the students fill out the "Community Exploration Evaluation."

7. Remind the students that they will be visiting a hospital for the next session. Keeping in mind that this setting may make some of the youngsters anxious, take extra time for questions and descriptions.

**Session 7:** Work Settings - Hospitals

**Objectives:** The students will:

1. Visit a hospital in the local community.
2. Tour the hospital, observing different workers and their duties. If you can contact a nurse's aide, it would be best for the group to go around with him/her to observe him/her making beds for non-ambulatory patients, taking temperatures, taking pulses, and taking blood pressure readings.
3. Meet the short-term goal of successfully taking a mock "patient's" temperature, and filling his/her water pitcher.

**Outline:**

1. Review what was learned in the last group.
2. Go to the local hospital. (Follow the guidelines given in the Visiting Work Settings section.)
3. If possible, have the students do some of the easier tasks of a nurse's aide, such as taking a temperature or filling a water pitcher. Also, be sure to tour the kitchen and the pharmacy. Prompt them to ask questions by asking some yourself to help ease the tension that being in this setting may cause some of them.
4. Meet with the hospital's Director of Personnel. Have him/her talk about a variety of different jobs in the hospital as well as their qualifications.
5. When you return to the agency, ask the students the following questions:
   a. What jobs require medical training?
   b. What jobs do not require medical training?
   c. Do any of these jobs give "medical" experience? If so, describe what you would gain.

d. What are the hygiene rules for working in in the cafeteria?

e. Describe how the dish washing line works.

f. Describe how and when meals are prepared for the patients.

g. Describe the non-medical position available in the pharmacy.

h. Would you like to work in a hospital setting?

5. Have the students fill out the "Community Exploration Evaluation."

**Session 8:** Summarizing and Evaluating the Community Exploration Program

**Objectives:** The students will:

1. Integrate the different experiences they had in the Community Exploration Program.
2. Think about how they can use the information they learned in the program in their future efforts to work.
3. Complete the Community Exploration Program Evaluation.
4. Provide feedback and student satisfaction information to the staff.
5. Recognize and express their feelings about leaving the group, and share these appropriately with other group members.

**Outline:**

1. Briefly review each of the preceding sessions and help students summarize the things they saw and learned. Encourage students to share their personal reactions to this new information.
2. Give out the assembled program file workbooks, containing each student's Community Exploration Program Self-Assessment, Neighborhood Surveys, and all "Community Exploration Evaluations." Explain that these provide a record for students of their site visits, and their reactions to various types of jobs and work settings. Encourage students to use these workbooks in the future when looking for work and considering different types of careers.
3. Ask the students to share their feelings about the group. Prompt them by giving your own reactions to the way things went. Ask the students to fill out the Community Exploration Program Evaluation, telling them that they do not have to put their names on it (so that they can be more honest). Be sure to thank them for their input.

4. Each teacher should speak to the students individually in the group and/or as a group. Staff should express their feelings about separating from the group and model an appropriate way to say goodbye. Encourage each student to find an appropriate way to say goodbye to each other and the staff.

COMMUNITY EXPLORATION PROGRAM EVALUATION

---

Mark True (T) or False (F) after the following statements:

---

1. The information covered in this group seemed very related to the real world of work. _____

2. I feel like I know my community better because of this group. _____

3. I will use what I learned in this group in the future._____

4. It helped me to see other people working. _____

5. I feel more confident using the public transportation system. _____

6. I learned that I have some good vocational skills while I was in this group. _____

7. I feel more positive about working since I took this group. _____

8. I feel more self-confident about working since being in this group. _____

9. I liked this group. _____

10. If I could change or improve this group, I would:

    _____

    _____

11. Please write any other comments that you may have about this group.

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____